

Pussy Riot Collective Statement

Last week, members of our collective, Pussy Riot, visited Washington, D.C. to meet with the U.S. State Department and members of Congress who might help release two of our friends, Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, who are imprisoned in penal colonies in Russia, for the crime of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.

They have been sentenced to two years in prison as extremists, receiving harsh punishments like vicious neo-Nazis and ultranationalists responsible for hate crimes against ethnic minorities, and are serving time alongside violent criminals, including murderers.

Our friends are mothers with small children. They are artists who are expressing our social and political views. Nothing more.

Pussy Riot is a collective of women active in feminist, LGBT, environmental, and other causes in Russia. We formed in advance of Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency, which has been marred by deteriorating human rights conditions in Russia.

Our band stands for many freedoms, including our feminist values. These are values that directly contradict the culture of the "macho man," led by Vladimir Putin that marginalizes women and degrades our role in society.

Many Russians did not pay attention to politics, but by 2011 they saw an arrogance in Putin, and it has activated people, many of whom have taken to the streets in protest. It activated Pussy Riot, too. And for our protests, two of us were carted off to a penal colony, as violent criminals. The Russian Government is attempting to use all the institutions at its power--courts, the Duma, church—to suppress dissent.

We are but one example of dissenters who have been charged with crimes since Vladimir Putin's inauguration.

We urge the United States to take notice of what is happening in Russia, of how we are slipping backwards, not toward progress, but toward repression. We ask you, members of the Senate, to work for the release of our friends who aren't hooligans or criminals, but women who have strong views and the courage to voice them. Thank you.